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ABSTRACT

A survey of assimilation processes of Vietnamese immigrants suggests that biculturalism enables a person to gain the benefits of economic and political enfranchisement while still receiving social and psychological nourishment from his/her native culture-cluster. The sample consisted of three groups of Vietnamese immigrants who arrived in San Francisco beginning in 1972. Group I Vietnamese were educated in Vietnam and France. The French speaking community in San Francisco quickly provided economic assistance, aided in schooling and housing, and merged the Vietnamese into their own social patterns. The heads of households gained jobs which capitalized upon their professional knowledge and closely paralleled the national standards of professionals in the United States. Group II Vietnamese were of Chinese origin. Although they did not find the linguistic enclave that Group I did, they did find a socio-political and racial enclave with which to merge. The Chinese Americans, as an economic entity, provided jobs for most of Group II Vietnamese. Group III Vietnamese, although possessing the same middle class characteristics of Groups I and II, had no second culture cluster with which to align. Forty percent receive some form of federal assistance and 20 percent have minimum wage jobs. This group, left at the margin of society, is denied an opportunity to contribute. Only a change in relocation, public education, and social service policies and the traditional philosophy of group assimilation will provide a Vietnamese culture cluster which will work similarly to the clusters Groups I and II encountered. (Author/KC)

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Moving Toward Cultural Pluralism

Part II

"Enculturation Within Group Culture-Clusters"

SO 012 467

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Note: The research reported here began in San Francisco, California in 1974 as a study of the assimilation patterns of Vietnamese immigrants. The objective of the study was to observe the efficiency of various assimilation patterns in giving the new immigrants the benefit of economic advantages, political advantages or social standing. The original question: If a Vietnamese person wanted access to money, power and prestige what would he/she have to do upon immigration to American society? Several incongruences were noted between the actual pattern of assimilation and the expected pattern detailed in the work of Gordon (1958, 1964) and others. The characteristics of this new pattern were examined in a 1976 paper to the World Educators Association (Llanes, 1976). Further study has eliminated some unexplained incongruences and new research approaches have provided a clearer understanding of how the differentiated process of americanization functions in the urban society. This is the second part of the study, submitted for the XXX International Conference on Communication: Human Evolution and Development. - 1980

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I. In order to explain the process of economic, social and political enfranchisement in american societies, sociologists and anthropologists have often used an illustration, consisting of concentric circles each made to stand for a stage of progression toward the stated objective of full membership in the core group of the society (see Figure 1).

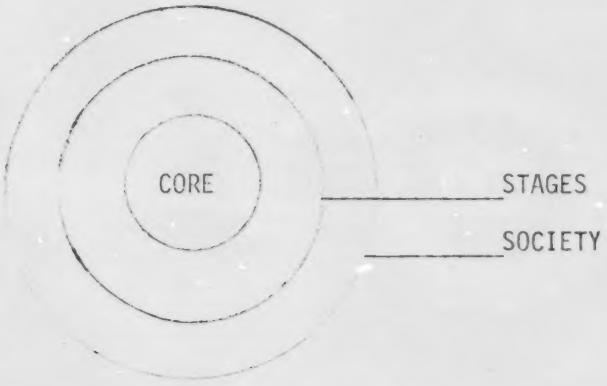

Figure 1

Most individuals from other cultures or societies, ie. immigrants, are said to arrive at the fringe of the society when they arrive penniless and without the carte-blanche language of the society, English. How long they remain at the fringes depends upon a series of variables described as stages of progression toward a center core which enfranchises individuals and is able to provide them with one or more of the commodities that are in short supply in the society: money, power and prestige. The Center core of the society is described as primarily composed of "essentially White Protestant Middle Class Clay, to which all other particles are attracted:" (Fishman, 1961).

There is very little variance in the literature on the processes involved

in enfranchising to this center core. While some authors present the thesis of enfranchisement with nine steps, and others identify as few as five steps, the authors remain faithful to the notion that a certain amount of personal or group transformation is imperative in the process of enfranchisement to a center core. Anthropological essayists view intrinsic/extrinsic cultural characteristics as being modified by the assimilation process and some of their concentric circles are composed of material change in culture. This transculturation is necessary because the individuals who are members of the central core of the society are often of another culture and demand that those enfranchised be more and more like them.

To become more and more like those in power or those who possess money or command prestige, appears to be an international exercise, common to all modern technological societies, some less developed societies and even some primitive societies.

In homogeneous societies, assimilation to a center core involves no transculturation per se, but it does involve some behavorial change which is symbiotically brought about as a result of a change in social class for the individual or group that is assimilating. This acculturation-free assimilation is made possible by the likely extrinsic and intrinsic sameness of the individuals' racial, ethical and moral beliefs.

In a heterogeneous society, where one racial or cultural group, occupies or appears to occupy the majority position in the center core, enfranchisement means assimilation to the culture group's racial, ethical and moral beliefs. For some groups - - and the Vietnamese are one of them - - this assimilation to the "white, middle class", English-speaking core involves

substantial change in their cultural expression through behavior, at least, and perhaps a transculturation.

The educational system mirrors this philosophy. While the process of education at the classroom level can be totally pluralistic - varying as widely in traditions, functions and structures; as they vary in size, control and availability of funds - the process is measured in terms of national assessment standards. This standardized measure is only statistically pluralistic, and is totally homogeneous in the cultural ways it demands. This philosophy is justified only insofar as it is "in the best interest of the children."

The effects of transculturation, ie. the shift from one cultural pattern to another, have not been fully studied, but the personal confrontation in the devaluation of the self and family are key factors in the loss of self-esteem. This personal confrontation, when it takes place in a classroom results in loss of interest on the part of the student (Ramirez and Castaneda, 1974) and on the job; this personal confrontation results in stress, alcoholism absenteeism and reduced productivity (Kneeland, 1977).

Education in the nation of the United States is geared to producing an individual who more or less and to the maximum extent possible, reflects the behaviors of a hypothetical being, a fully contributing, competition-equipped, attractively mainstreamed person, who is better equipped to assimilate. This hypothetical being, to which "all other particles adhere", is not only mythical and unreachable, but is also not interested in enfranchising those who are culturally, racially and linguistically different.

Only a system of public education that allows the individual to develop his/her own culture while acquiring the culture of the mainstream, is efficient enough to bring about socio-economic enfranchisement without the human dysfunctions associated with involuntary transculturation.

It is hypothesized that a biculturally educated human would function in the society as enfranchised but untransculturated, thereby gaining the benefits of economic and political enfranchisement while receiving credible social and psychological nourishment from the group of his/her native culture-cluster.

The most significant factor arguing against bicultural education is its hypothetical inefficiency, in terms of school-community costs, segmentation of markets, and pluralization of objectives. The cries of "twentieth century Balkanization" of the American culture notwithstanding, biculturality is functionally effective and in terms of social development, it may be the only choice open to us in a democratic system.

The following report outlines the foundational knowledge leading to this opinion.

II. Sociologists tend to look at the progress toward full membership in a society, as either a process of conflict resolution or group strategy, and it is they who also add race to the mix of variables which affect the progress of the group.

The objective voice of the empiricist tells us that assimilation of one person or group to another person or group is a most auspicious sign of the co-existance of these in a diverse society. But beyond the empiricist's perspective lies the personal confrontation posed by assimilation and this can be described as the conflict inherent in depreciating the familiar, appreciating the new and having this process be primarily one-way.

Those who can't, or won't, acculturate become marginal beings in a dynamic society whose centrifugal force causes them to become first isolated and later separated, to form their own cell-like environment in which a nucleus is clearly evident from the beginning and a core-society emerges within the first generation.

The most obvious of these push-pull reorganization of cultures are underworld social arrangements - - Mafia, Cosa Nostra, Yen-fu, Mileous - - and the least obvious are the cultural arrangements which we have misclassified in the United States as the ethnic enclaves, but that are in fact separate cultural reorganizations, connected to each other by a common set of survival interests.

The less obvious are the ethnic elites of urban America who function as if they had achieved total assimilation but in fact remain "outside the primary groups and institutions of the soceity." (Gordon, 1964) These ethnic elites are able to function as core society members--i.e., they often control money, power or prestige--and are able to share it with others. But they are still outside of the society's center core. As Greeley describes their unique situation: "There simply are not enough others of their own background who have also made it for the ethnic arriviste to feel at ease." (Greeley, 1971)

It is often the case that the ethnic core members see themselves committed to their own or a similar ethnic group, by an issue or event that reaches their own deep cultural makeup and causes them to act. One such event was the arrival in San Francisco, beginning in 1972, of a large group of Vietnamese escaping their native land in search of freedom, a capitalist society, a decent job commensurate with their skills, a new lease on life, in short, the American dream.

Because there were in San Francisco in 1972 a set of conditions that had been created by the impossibility of complete cultural adaptation and enfranchisement in the society, the new culturally different group found several choices available to them as to how they were to proceed to assume their share of the American dream.

A group of arriving Vietnamese who spoke French and were by this definition members of the old-established Vietnamese elite of Saigon and Hanoi, had the choice of adhering to the prestigious and moderately affluent Francophone ethnic/international group; and they did.

The ethnic Chinese who arrived from Vietnam were fortunate to have brought with them two sets of cultural baggage: the traditions and deep culture of their ethnic Chinese heritage and language and the modern Vietnamese technocratic behavior which they could easily "Americanize" further.

The balance of the immigrant group were the Vietnamese who were (by our definition) monocultural. While possessing the same middle class characteristics of the other two groups, they had no "second set of behaviors" that would permit them to assimilate to a center core group of any sort. They were not Francophiles, or ethnic Chinese, they were just Vietnamese: educated, motivated and knowledgeable of the ways of an urban technology, but without an "old-boy network" to plug into it; they were just new Americans faced with the long and arduous task of assimilation to a core that is so different in race, religion, values and symbols so as to be in the opposite range of human cultural and biological expression.

These observations, and the data that follows, caused us to hypothesize that a sociocultural arrangement which recognized the existance of culture-clusters, each with their own core culture group, would be necessary in order to explain the differences in the efficiency and effectiveness of social enfranchisement of the immigrant sub-groups. (See Figure 2)

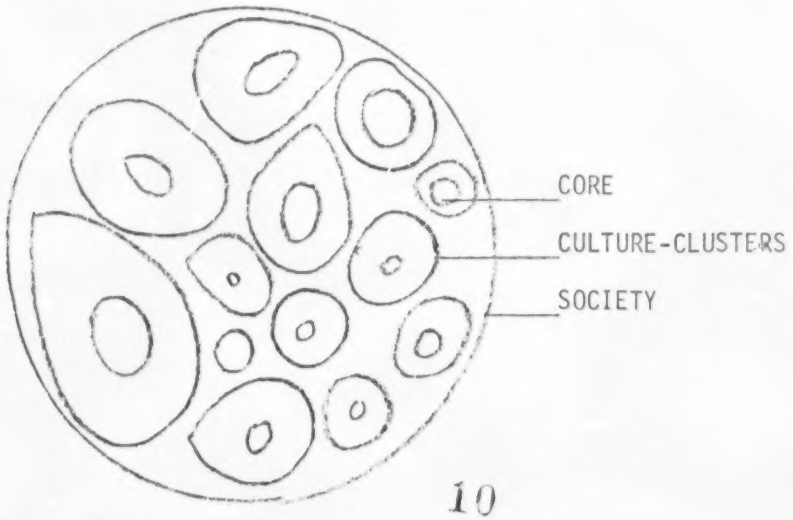

Figure 2

The rearranged social pattern would have to show independent cell-like culture-clusters, each with its own nucleus or center core and each with its own set of enfranchising criteria.

Each cell-like culture-cluster would have a share of the limited resources of the society and would, if it followed the pattern of assimilation best known to us as identificational assimilation, enfranchise people on the basis of how much like the nucleus or center-core they each were.

Thus, the Vietnamese who were Franchophones had linguistic and cultural characteristics which the Franco-American cell would recognize and which might cause the enfranchising center-core of this culture-cluster to protectively assimilate them, to the extent of their resources. The same would be true of the ethnic Chinese from Vietnam but it would not be true for the monocultural Vietnamese who had no culture-cluster to which to adhere and had no choice but to pursue enfranchisement to the center core of the total society defined by Fishman. (Fishman, 1961)

The sample under study was therefore divided into three groups[1] on the basis of these rearranged culture-clusters and their human development and enculturation was studied in psychosocial and socioeconomic dimensions.

Our Group 1 Vietnamese was educated in Vietnam and France and in some cases a third country. Their extrinsic cultural characteristics closely parallel the status and class behavior of the Francophone San Francisco society nominally led by a prominent French citizen assigned to the American city for many years. We originally reported them as having "assimilated along linguistic lines, using their second or prestige language as the initial carte blanche of assimilation. The French speaking community made emergency arrangements for the incoming French-speaking Vietnamese. They provided economic assistance, arranged for placement in schools, assisted in the selection of housing within the Franco-American enclaves, and, as can be easily observed in social gatherings of the French-speaking, merged the Vietnamese into their own social patterns. It can be said that a mutual "adoption" took place, independent of race, but dependent upon certain linguistic and cultural preferences." (Llanes, 1976)

Only two of the Group 1 Vietnamese head of household did not speak English. The other four had a very basic command of English. Sociological theory says that knowledge of the English language is the first stage of assimilation. In this case, however, the language of assimilation was French and not English. The six heads of household were all granted enfranchisement to desired jobs which capitalized upon their professional knowledge and closely parallelled the national standards of pay, benefit, status, etc., for other professionals in their class. This enfranchisement took place within the first year and was independent of any assimilation to cultural patterns of the center core of the Franco-American culture. Subsequent surveys of the Group 1 Vietnamese reveal a more complete pattern of adherence to the

cultural patterns of the center core of the Franco-American culture. Only one of the Group 1 "heads of households" is neither employed by French speaking employers, nor significantly assisted by a Francophone to find his current job. Only one family has moved from the French enclave and none have removed their children from the French bilingual programs where they were initially directed by the host. In every variant of social interaction, the Franco-American cultural "cell" has served the immigrant population as an environment for enfranchisement and, while the Group 1 population remains below the income, power and prestige standards they held in their native country, they are better able to vie for the fruits of the society from a stronger and more nourishing cultural base, than their counterparts Group 2 and 3.

There has been no opportunity to evaluate progress of the immigrant Group 1 toward the last stage of assimilation, "Intermarriage."

Unlike the Group 1 Vietnamese, the Group 2 Vietnamese is racially integrated with its "host cultural cell," the Chinese-American enclave. The Group 2 Vietnamese are the most numerous in both our sample and the immigrated totals. Our study stratified the random sample in such a way as to eliminate differences in urban-rural backgrounds, sex, education and professional attainment. In both groups we differentiated only along three variables: Francophone/Non-Francophone, Catholic/Buddist, and Ethnic-Chinese/Non-Ethnic-Chinese.[2]

Group 2, we noted, "did not find upon arrival the linguistic enclave that

would provide support, but they did find one socio-political and one racial enclave with which to merge. The sociopolitical enclave is formed by those who in the recent past, sought refuge in the United States for political reasons. These are the non-Communist Chinese, the Anti-Marcos-Filipinos, the Koreans and other similarly persecuted Asians. The racial enclave extends beyond these cultural cells to the rest of the Asian American of San Francisco, numbering 124, 500, and encompassing several cultural cells." (Llanes, 1976)

The Group 2 Vietnamese sought membership primarily in the Chinese-American cell. Partly as a result of the fact that most individuals in this category (68%) claimed an ancestral linkage with China, although not earlier than the third generation past, the intrinsic or deep-culture traits found the adjustment needs to be minimal. While there were few Mandarian or Cantonese speakers in the group (20%) there was communication in other Chinese dialects and through their extrinsic non-verbal language. But most important, the arriving Vietnamese sought and found that the Chinese-American enclave was able to provide them with employment. This key ingredient, is added to the cultural acceptance and religious homogeneity, to form the conditions for social enfranchisement.

The Group 2 Vietnamese found upon arrival that the Chinese-American culture of San Francisco possessed its own slice of the American pie. Long the victims of discrimination (Low, 1979) and social isolation, the Chinese-American had sought to organize as an economic entity[3] and a separate cultural entity. Until recently, the Chinese-Americans had not sought political

power and unlike the Group 1 hosts they could not share this social prestige with the incoming group. They could nonetheless provide economic enfranchisement and very soon after the first wave of immigration the signs went up in most Chinese shop windows of Chinatown, in Vietnamese and Cantonese, "Help Wanted/Welcome Vietnamese."

Our Group 2 Vietnamese found most of their jobs that way. Five years later most have moved on from Chinatown and the urban enclave that gave them a welcome, but remain closely aligned to a Chinese-American Group through work (62%), religious activity (82%) or social interactions (70%). There is intermarriage reported but there are no inter-racial characteristics to this intermarriage.

From these developments it is clear to us that the cultural cells of the Franco-Americans and the Chinese-Americans each have center cores that can support life of immigrant groups and that each core selects, along lines of language, race, religion and sociopolitical or class views that reinforce their own prejudices; those individuals it views as desirable additions to this core group. It is also evident that each cell poses markedly different criteria for those it wishes to enfranchise and this raises questions about the suitability of a monoculturally conceived public educational systems, to help in the pluralistically conceived needs of cultural cells.

The almost unanimous choice of the Group 1 Vietnamese to retain their children in private schools for the sake of the Franchophonic maintenance--at a very high tuition--is one indication that they perceive their continued cultural

development (and thus the cultural development of their children) as being linked to the host cell to which they claim adherence primarily through knowledge of French language and culture. For them the monolingual system of public education with its compensatory view of the bilingual and their transitional bilingual status, is clearly not in their best interest.

The same effect can be noted in the enfranchisement criteria established by the Cuban-Americans in Dade County, Florida. Having established a large core group for their cultural cell, the Cuban-Americans demand dual-language fluency for most employment, all social membership and most political activity. As a result, they have worked at a National level for bilingual education programs and supplement this treatment with Spanish language media, home-language learning support and a very active private school enrollment. (Sole, 1981)

What we see here is evidence of long-range activity which is geared toward the improvement of the current condition, through what Gordon describes as an "increased sense of peoplehood" (Gordon, 1964), but we see that the cultural development is dual and distinctively bicultural.

The Group Three Vietnamese differ significantly in their outlook and their situation, when compared with the other two groups. They tend to come closer to the norm for most Vietnamese immigrated to the United States, (Kneeland, 1977) which are less educated and from rural backgrounds. Forty percent are receiving some form of assistance from the federal government and 20 percent have minimum wage jobs. Only three heads of households (10%) have obtained a job in the field which they practiced in Vietnam and none of them have been able to regain their social class and status. In a culture where suicide is

an honorable end to a dishonored life, four individuals from our sample have chosen to end their lives.

Sixteen Group 3 Heads of Household, or 55 percent of the sample, have found jobs that enable them to support their families in dignity and comfort. While not within their own profession, the jobs arrived as a welcome end to a prolonged period of unemployment. They had arrived through a period of recession and unemployment of the economy and lacking the "old-boy network" of the Chinese and the French, they were at the mercy of the well intentioned but highly ineffective federal program employee charged with finding jobs for the structurally unemployed.

To these sixteen families, a waiter's job for father meant food and shelter and the promise of the better life. They were the lucky ones. They know many who are not doing as well.

The three groups were compared in measures of perceived control over their lives, also termed locus of control, and in this variant the sharpest differences take place. Group 1 and Group 2 show similar attitudes toward the decisions affecting their own lives, (See Table 1) while Group 3 showed quite dissimilar attitudes. A control group of native-born Asians was selected for this measure only and their attitudes were most similar to those of Group 1.

Income comparisons showed Group 1 ahead, Group 2 significantly behind and Group 3 behind Group 2. In this comparison the relative wealth and power of the center core appears to be a variable of significance in the Group 1/ Group 2 comparisons, but no such correlation appears with Group 3 analysis. (Table 2)

TABLE 1

Selected Variables	Group One	Group Two	Group Three	Control
Control Over				
Personal:				
Do and Say	120	82	81	189
Believe and Act	80	61	42	166
Go Against Norm	62	41	21	173
Occupational:				
Retain Job	106	99	61	123
Advancement	86	51	20	102
Pay	126	56	21	81
Familial:				
Where to Live	160	120	61	186
Education of Children	141	95	42	122
Welfare of Family	168	110	64	142

Table 1 - Comparisons of Perceived Levels of Control over Selected Variables - Absolute Control = 200

TABLE 2

Family Income	N:6 Group One	N:40 Group Two	N:30 Group Three
Over $15,000	35.0	15.8	---
$10,000 to $15,000	50.0	45.3	26.0
$ 5,000 to $ 9,999	15.0	36.9	42.2
Less than $ 5,000	---	2.0	31.8
	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 2 - Family Income Comparisons After four years of Residence in the United States

III. The data seem to indicate that assimilation to a center core is necessary before the individuals immigrating acquire the social, financial and psychological independence to function as a contributing member of the society.

The data also indicates that enfranchisement to a center core need not involve transculturation when there is present in the society a culture-cluster familiar to the immigrating groups, with a center core capable of providing social, economic and psychological enfranchisement.

From this data it seems resonable to hypothesize that the most effective immigration relocation practice would be that which seeks to form culture-clusters around hospitable center cores. At present, immigration relocation programs seek the opposite effect and would, on the basis of this data, serve to create "Group 3" people all over the United States.

Also from this data it seems reasonable to hypothesize that a system of public education which seeks to maintain and enhance the enfranchising cultural characteristics of the group immigrating (French for Group 1 and Chinese for Group 2) would strengthen the bonds that exist within the culture-cluster and improve their sociocultural development. Thus, individuals brought up through a bilingual and bicultural educational system, would be the most successful participating citizens from the second-generation group.

In policy terms our evolving findings bring us face to face with the fallacy of our assumptions. In a very pluralistic society the individual is pluralistically perceived and there is someone within the society who recognizes the individual's value and causes his unique contribution to emerge. Increased

plurality leads us not to inefficiency. We see in the data how it can help a city like San Francisco, being faced with the challenges of massive immigration, respond in pluralistic and unpredictable ways to extract value from the burden. We must now face up to the policy decisions which will make it possible for the public education system, the immigration relocation system, and the Social Service agencies to collaborate, along pluralistic lines, to improve the human condition for which we have become responsible.

The plight of the Group 3 Vietnamese continues, largely ignored by the political and social forces which created their need to immigrate. The trained minds of the heads of house holds have frozen into a pre-1972 frame and their anguish and despair goes much beyond the numerical measures of Table 1. Their families mirror the anguish and discontent and the youths emerging from that environment are neither as Vietnamese as their family would want or as American as we would want. The youths adapt to the mainstream as best they can, but the mainstream fails to adopt them. The are left at the margin of the society, draining society and being denied an opportunity to contribute. It is as if our society was so wealthy that it could afford to sacrifice a few thousand people each year, subjecting them to structural unemployment and social marginality, instead of seeking to make of them contributing human beings.

Only cultural development of a Vietnamese culture-cluster can hope to end this anguish. In order to create such a Cluster Immigration relocation policies, public educational policies, social service policies and the traditional philosophy of group assimilation need to be changed. Perhaps Nguyen Thi Amh* said it best...

"I used to be a lot with friends, but now I am alone always. I didn't know what I am searching. I used a lot of philosophy book, but I can't find any answers. That's all American way. Everyone says I try too hard. Really, I want to make a lot of experience. I thought experience was good...I didn't expect I would smoke a lot like this...Is very bad. You say I look like a quiet boy--but outside. Inside is very different."

*Nguyem Thi Amh is a pseudonym

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Notes

1. The Sample

GROUP	HEADS OF HOUSEHOLDS	TOTAL FAMILY MEMBERS
I	6	21
II	40	106
III	30	120

2. Constant Group Characteristics

Income in Vietnam: Above 50 percent of Urban Population

Education: 4-years of College or Equivalent Military or Civilian training for each head of household.

Geography: Urban; Saigon/Hanoi

Sex of Heads of Households: Male

Professional Attainment: Officer, Manager, Owner of small or medium sized business, Doctor, Lawyer, Accountant

3. Chinese Six Companies

In 1860 the Chinese community of San Francisco organized as an economic entity called the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, commonly known as the Chinese Six Companies, in order to "provide for a common source of economic strength, and work toward social recognition." For further details see, Hoy, Williams, "The Chinese Six Companies" - Chinese Benevolent Publishers.